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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

George Bancroft

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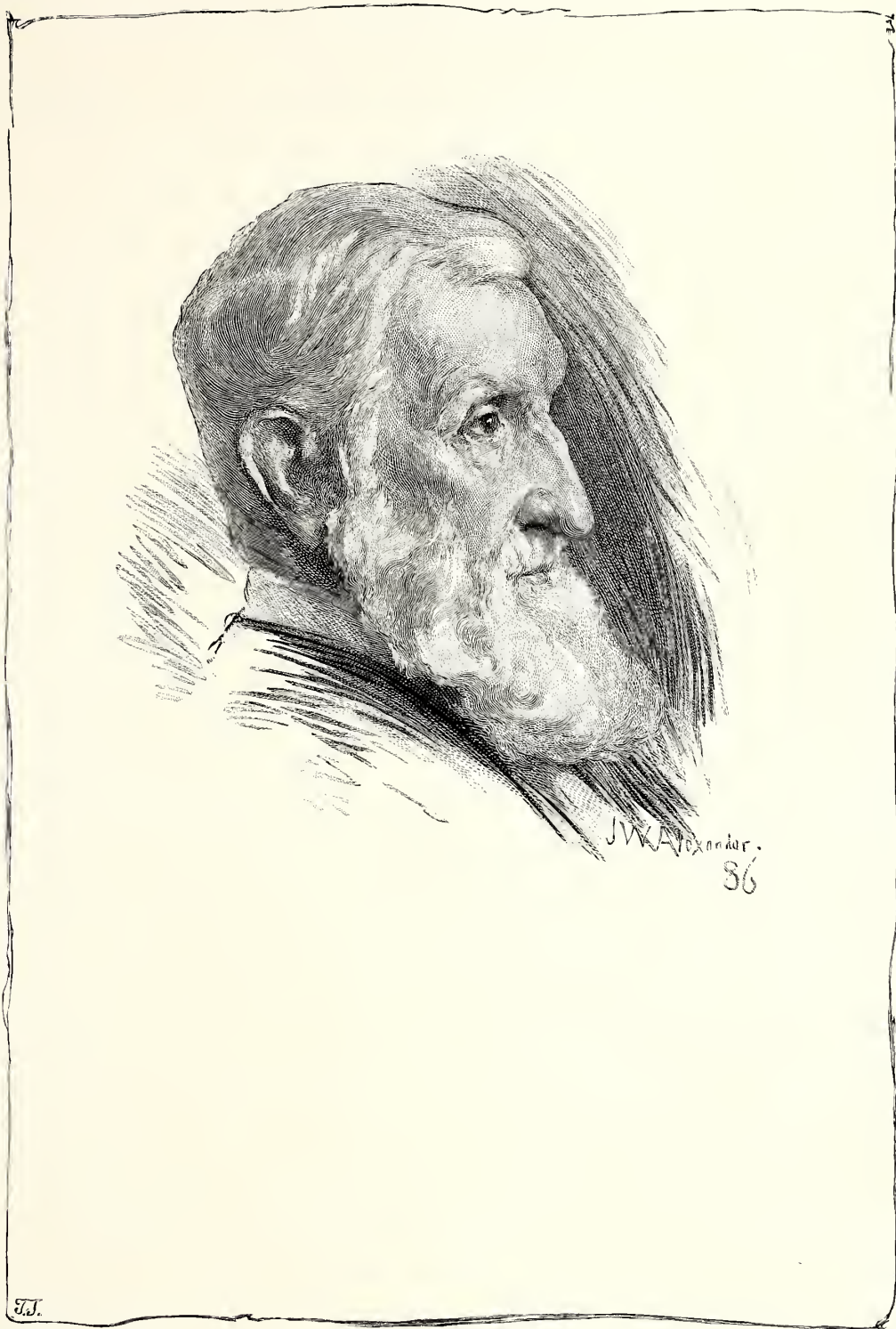
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George Bancroft

From an original
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FREDERICK H. MESERVE
148 EAST 78th STREET
NEW YORK 21, N. Y.



DRAWN BY J. W. ALEXANDER.

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Geo. Bancroft.

W. W. Jan 1888

GEORGE BANCROFT—IN SOCIETY, IN POLITICS, IN LETTERS. 473

ter overtook us in the afternoon at Witmer's house, about four and a half miles from Gettysburg by the Carlisle road, where after an engagement they were repulsed with some loss. I have narrated enough for my purpose, and will only add that, after many vicissitudes, we finally reached Harrisburg, having marched fifty-four out of sixty consecutive hours, with a loss of some two hundred men.

I can recall no instance in our civil war where the people of a town rose in a body, or in any numbers, to aid their troops in driving out the enemy. Now, in view of the fact that Gettysburg, small town as it then was, furnished its quota of brave men who were then in the army serving their several terms of enlistment; and that from it and its immediate vicinity were raised promptly two, if not three, companies of men in defense of their State;

that one of its oldest as well as one of its youngest citizens took up arms for the same purpose and aided in the battle; that hundreds of the unfortunate men of Reynolds's gallant corps were secreted, sheltered, fed, and aided in every way by the men and women of Gettysburg when they were hurled back through its streets, as I know from personal communication with them—I say, in view of these facts, let us give these people the credit that belongs to them instead of casting continued reflections upon their actions. I can the more justly give my opinion in this matter because I was the only member of our company who did not belong to Gettysburg. I went to Harrisburg to be mustered in with the others because my brother, then a student in the Seminary, was amongst them.

READING, PA., Nov. 2, 1886. H. M. M. Richards.

GEORGE BANCROFT—IN SOCIETY, IN POLITICS, IN LETTERS.



THE period in the life of our distinguished historian which might stand for a type of his manifold labors and extended activity was that of his mission to Germany. His quiet but elegantly appointed house on the Thiergarten at Berlin was the scene of his most successful diplomatic achievement. It was during his life there that he received the splendid homage of the literary men from all Europe as one of the foremost historians of a time abounding in great historians. It was there that all the threads which connected a fruitful and energetic old age with the education and experience of a restless and fertile youth were finally united to bind the laurels of a great and enduring reputation. And yet as the setting is so important to the picture, it would perhaps distort our view of him as an American, to dwell too long on the rather dazzling splendor of surroundings so aristocratic and foreign. We will like better to think of him in his summer-home as he stands, hat in hand, to welcome the expected visitor under the trees in Newport where the entrance avenue bends toward the great verandas of his large but unostentatious house, which he built there over thirty years ago amid the then quiet beauties of the "Point." As the splendid mansions and somewhat showy gardens have multiplied about him, the friendly screen of his plantations has steadily inclosed him and his favorite roses from the surroundings until the casual visitor, either from the land-side or the wonderful cliff-walk, would pass by ignorant of even the existence of a spot so beautiful in itself and so interesting in its associations. It is even more fitting, however, to recall the American statesman, the American

historian, the laborious and successful representative of the American people in his stately home in Washington. The spacious staircase to the right leads the visitor past the drawing-room and the dining-room upward to the second story, which barely holds the volumes of the great library that lines the walls, fills the entries and passage-ways, and overflows into the window-seats and on to the floors. The busy click of the typewriter gives evidence of the unceasing literary activity of the chief in the labor of his stenographer, and as the door of the great work-room, with its lofty ceilings and open fire-place, is thrown back to receive you, the harmony of these surroundings with the life of the man is evident, even striking.

The figure which rises from behind the work-table, littered with reference-books and manuscripts, is full of dignity and impressiveness. The clear-cut features; the carefully trimmed hair and beard, revealing a massive and shapely head; the finely molded form and active movement, in no way suggest advanced years: even the expression of the eye and the lines of the forehead fail to reveal frailness or extreme old age. As has recently been said of his friend and contemporary Von Ranke, who was only five years his senior, he seems to have outgrown and conquered old age itself, and to have found a substitute for physical force in the continuous energy of faith and love, in an apparently inexhaustible and indomitable intellect. His stature, which is about that of the average man or somewhat less, has lost nothing under the burden of years, and he carries firm and erect the slight but close-knit chest and capacious head with which he has for so long pushed and wrought in the crises and struggles of the great world in which he lives. Nor is there a trace of lassitude in his manners. The same trait which Harriet Martineau noted and

recorded of him and his household fifty years ago in the account of her travels in the United States is still characteristic—that of joyousness. Change and bereavement, toil and anxiety, have in no way diminished or altered the capacity for appreciation of what is best in life and in mankind. The interchange of interest and relation begins at once in his conversation; the present is not overshadowed by the distant past, and it is only some natural reference to a personal experience—it may be a memory of the appearance of Goethe, or the talk of Byron—which suddenly overwhelms the listener in the realization that this is a Nestor. The force of his incessant labor in the noble fields of making and writing history is fitly supplemented by the grandeur inherent in eighty-six years of life—eighty-six years, with all it means at this stage in the world's development! The nineteenth century, from the childhood to the maturity, not of men, but of nations, as the present generation knows them; from absolutism through revolution to democracy in politics; from the classic and romantic in letters to modern realism; from the rude beginnings of chemistry and physics to the overwhelming conquests of the natural sciences in every direction; from the stage-coach and post-boy to the railway and telegraph—Bancroft has surely been favored in the splendor of the times and the achievements of hand and mind of which he has been a part.

The great vitality underlying an activity and perseverance so phenomenal is in no sense accidental. It is in part inherited, in part self-created. The Bancroft family has been for over two centuries and a half in America. It was from the beginning frugal in its living and high in its thinking, as were so many of the families in the early New England communities. Simple lives and pure thoughts are the best architects of health and contentment. The historian's grandsire was one of the leading men in the town of Lynn, then known as Reading. His character was so famous as a man of God that if no clergyman could be secured, he frequently officiated in the services of the Lord's day; and when Jonathan Edwards was hounded to despair by the congregation of Northampton because he wished to prevent the young from reading books which he considered obscene, it was to this elder Bancroft that he turned as his umpire in the reference which settled the dispute and severed his connection with an ungrateful and unappreciative parish. The orthodoxy of the distinguished grandson was drawn from the fountain-head, for his famous father, the Rev. Aaron Bancroft of Worcester, was a Unitarian, and no sympathizer with Calvinism either in religion or in politics. He, too, lived

to be a nonagenarian, and aside from the reputation earned by his long career as a pastor, left a name renowned for honesty of purpose and purity of living, which was linked with some literary fame. He was the author of a "Life of Washington," now unknown, but which was once an authority, and is marked by accuracy of statement and a most agreeable literary quality and style. The inheritance of a wholesome, untainted, vigorous blood which George Bancroft had from his sires was not suffered to lie idle. It was a day of small things in Massachusetts where material indulgences were concerned, and throughout his early life at home in Worcester, his boyhood at Exeter Academy, and his college days at Harvard, he had constant training in the lessons of a wholesome economy, the education of self-restraint, and the triumphs of a laborious and well-directed ambition. The impressions thus gained were no doubt strengthened and confirmed by the experiences of his student life at Göttingen and Berlin, where his intimate association with men like Heeren, Voss, and Blumenbach made him still more familiar with frugal habits, simple tastes, and high scholarship.

STUDIES AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE preparatory years of Bancroft's career were over at an early age. He graduated from Harvard in the class of 1817, and was only seventeen on the 3d of October in the same year. His school life at Worcester is scarcely worthy of mention, so unsatisfactory was the instruction. His father's home was on a farm a mile and a half from the town in one direction, and Nelson's school, the only one of any repute, at the extreme opposite corner, so that from eight to eleven his daily tasks were begun and ended by a walk of more than two miles. When, at eleven, he left home for Exeter, he found himself, thanks to a friend of his father's who read Cæsar with him, on a level of attainment with his fellows. The principal of the school was that famous Dr. Abbott, who will ever rank as one of the great schoolmasters of America. Suave and earnest, serious but never harsh, solemn but kind, he never failed to command the perfect respect of every school-boy, and Bancroft immediately felt his influence. We are apt to smile at earnestness in a boy of eleven in our days, and as we expect little get little; but the real foundation of Bancroft's classical attainments was made at that age, in his own room, and with only a mediate impulse from class-room work. His other master was Hildreth, father of the historian, a notable teacher, strong and suggestive but at times severe and harsh. With the other masters, Fuller and Ware, he had little intercourse and no tasks, although

he always found a welcome and good wholesome talk in Fuller's room when he cared to visit him in the evening.

It was during the two years of his stay at Exeter that he first met and heard Webster. Nathan Parker, minister at Portsmouth, was a warm personal friend of the Bancrofts. He had read theology with the father and taught the son his letters. Accordingly the school-boy's vacations were naturally spent at his house. The memories of Parker's sweetness and goodness are among the pleasantest of his life. About that time Webster had removed to Portsmouth, and was to deliver the oration on Independence Day. He spoke from the pulpit of the small meeting-house to an audience which barely filled the room. He read his oration earnestly, and without any gesture whatever except that once he placed his right hand over his heart. One of the Exeter masters who sat in the gallery opposite Bancroft pronounced it a "wonderful good oration, which would have received boundless applause in Boston." It was soon after that Webster was elected to Congress.

Bancroft's college career was the determinative period of his life. In his Freshman year Edward Everett was his tutor in Greek, and awakened in him a profound admiration. Later, Everett was made Professor of Greek, and accepted on condition of being permitted to travel and study in preparation for the office. When in Göttingen, he wrote to President Kirkland recommending that a young man of promise be sent out to prepare for the next professorship that might fall vacant "by learning what was to be learned." The choice fell upon Bancroft, and soon after graduation the proposal was made to him, and his father gave his consent. The intellectual direction of Harvard had little influence on the sixteen-year-old boy, although the President was a warm sympathetic friend, exercising a paternal oversight and care in all his work and recreation. The text-book in philosophy was "Locke on the Understanding," and the instruction consisted in assigning so many pages as a lesson and a formal recitation, without regard to logical divisions or anything else except the words of the text. But in his Junior year "Edwards on the Will" fell into his hands. It seems to have had much the same fascination for him that Locke himself is said to have had for Edwards, but with a far different result. Instead of rousing Bancroft to opposition and polemics, Edwards' philosophy fascinated and convinced him, and in the writing and talk of his later life he has often referred to it as his creed. It was, however, essentially the philosophy of Edwards that moved him, for although in

deference to his father's wishes he studied theology for eight months, the profession of the ministry never attracted him, and he was drawn to letters and philosophy from the beginning. Enjoying as he did the society and protection of all that was best in the greatest intellectual center of his time in America, he nevertheless was led in a direction of thought very far from the prevailing one, and the intellectual atmosphere of Boston was almost from the first uncongenial.

It was with only a smattering knowledge of German that he entered upon his university life in Göttingen. It was natural, therefore, that his principal work should have been in German literature, from which he made a number of excellent translations that were afterwards published; in Greek philosophy, for which he had a natural aptitude and a previous training; and above all in the department of history, which, under the masterly guidance of the distinguished Heeren, was easily the foremost and most attractive in the University. Whether fortunately or unfortunately, the critical method in philology had not yet engulfed all others, and the enthusiasm of German students at that day was expended upon the beauties of the style, diction, and material of what they read. With his fellows Bancroft read, therefore, incessantly, both Greek and German, and formed a taste and capacity for wide generalizations. Dissen, the leading Professor of Philosophy, was an ardent Platonist, a famous student and teacher, but he never wrote, and his reputation is forgotten. He heard lectures from Eichhorn on the New Testament, from Blumenbach on natural history, and studied Arabic, Syriac, and Persian. But by far the most influential man of the Faculty was Heeren, who was as well the leading mind of all Europe in historical criticism. There is traceable throughout Bancroft's life, both in his history and his political course, the most marked and decided influence of Heeren, and of the splendid work which set on foot what was neither more nor less than a revolution in historical science.

Like many another ardent beginner, Bancroft went to Germany with the firm conviction that German students worked themselves to death. Perhaps the most valuable of all the lessons he learned was the truth of the exact opposite: the prevalence of moderation among the truly great; the careful intermixture of work and recreation; above all, the hatred and contempt of worry. Eichhorn once said he never knew of a case where death came from overwork, but he did know of many where worry and fretting had resulted in nervous collapse. He told of a poor young man, very anxious to succeed as a professor,

who came to obtain the use of his lecture-room, which was directly under his study. At the appointed hour the lecture began, intense, vehement, oratorical, and continued so to the end. "I called him up," said Eichhorn, "and explained that it would never, never do; that he would worry himself sick, and there would be an end of it all."

After two years in Göttingen, at the end of which he obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by examination and the defense of a thesis, Bancroft moved to Berlin. In Germany the young doctor is "free of the guild," and partly for that reason, no doubt, but especially because of the character of his work, he received a hearty welcome in the splendid literary circle of the Prussian capital. He was constantly in the houses of Savigny and Schleiermacher, being often bidden to the latter two or three times in a single week. He also knew William von Humboldt, F. A. Wolf, and Voss. Wolf once said in Bancroft's hearing that he could read Aristophanes as he could his prayer-book. "Impossible and untrue," said Voss when he heard it. "When I want to find anything in Homer, I first look for it in my own translation. No man can know a foreign language as he does his own." Bancroft was not attracted by Hegel, although he heard what was probably his most brilliant course of lectures, that on *Æsthetics*, in which he strove to find a basis for his system in the History of Philosophy. It seemed to his young hearer that his principal concern was to make the Christian religion go on all-fours with his philosophy, and his delivery was so far from being magnetic that it might almost be characterized as prosy. His philosophic system, moreover, was the talk of but the few in Berlin and never permeated the people, not even the cultivated classes. The lectures of Schleiermacher, on the contrary, were brilliant and attractive. Thoroughly familiar with Plato and the Socratic method, he was a master of dialectic, and was so keen in its exercise that he was rarely known to give any direct reply to questions designed to pin him down to a categorical answer with reference to controverted points in philosophy.

GOETHE, SCHLEIERMACHER, BYRON.

It was during a Göttingen vacation, four years after the battle of Waterloo, that Bancroft met Goethe for the first time at Jena. It was early in the forenoon; Bancroft had an introduction from one of the professors, and Goethe received him in the garden of the great house where the poet was occupying an apartment assigned him by the grand duke. The interview was altogether informal; Goethe's manner

was unstudied and natural, gracious and simple, although he was then over seventy years old. He was clad in the ordinary costume of the time, except that there was no waistcoat under his frock, and the shirt he wore showed by the stains on the ruffle that he had not made his toilet for the day. The conversation was on the topics of the hour in literature and the politics of Germany. On parting he gave Bancroft a letter to the librarian at Weimar with directions to ascertain whether his family could receive the young American. They did so, and entertained him in the kindest manner. A second interview took place at Weimar early in 1821. It was rather in the nature of an audience than like the friendly talk of the previous time. Goethe was carefully dressed, and though kind was rather cold, and preserved an impressive and stately manner. He was full of interest in America and predicted that it would excel in the arts of design, citing as a proof of this latent talent the fashion introduced by American papers of illustrating their advertisements by pictures. He also talked at some length about Byron, and took it for granted that "*Manfred*" was founded on "*Faust*."

On the whole no better picture of Bancroft at the close of his student life could be drawn than that contained in the few lines which Alexander von Humboldt wrote from Paris to introduce him to Pictet at Geneva:

"PARIS, 7 Septembre, 1821.

"Je prends la liberté, mon respectable ami et confrère, de vous recommander un jeune Américain qui a fait d'excellentes études de philologie et d'histoire philosophique en Allemagne. M. Bancroft est bien digne de vous voir de près; il est l'ami de mon frère, et il appartient à cette noble race de jeunes Américains qui trouvent que le vrai bonheur de l'homme consiste dans la culture de l'intelligence.—HUMBOLDT."*

The charge has been more or less frequently brought against him that, after all, he is foreign in his education and feelings, Teutonic in his sympathies as against France and England. The fact is that at no time and under no other circumstances could a young man of his powers have spent three years in Germany with less likelihood of absorbing prejudice or being dazzled. Aside from Heeren's there was little vigorous thought at Göttingen. Religious teaching was at as low an ebb as religious feeling. They had turned, for instance, the University church into a library, and the ministry of education begrudged a new church, so none was built. Heeren himself was a native of Bremen and a republican at heart; he even

* *Le Globe*, Journal Géographique. Organe de la Société de Géographie de Genève pour ses Mémoires et Bulletin. Tome vii. 7^e and 8^e Livraisons. Page 200. Novembre-Décembre, 1868. Genève. Imprimerie Carey Frères, 3 Vieux-Collège, 1868.

went so far as heartily to support Jefferson's embargo. Wise, good, and discreet, his influence was altogether in the right direction. The University of Berlin, to be sure, had just been started to give character and solidity to the institutions of Prussia; but in calling its professors the only question asked was whether the man was able. Accordingly on the one hand the conservatives, distorting Hegel's theory that the world, as it is, is the result of all the antecedent conditions of existence, declared that therefore the present system was the *ne plus ultra*, the height of perfection. On the other, aided by Schleiermacher, the world of Berlin was kept wide awake with new ideas of philosophy and religion, of the connection between the past and the present. But there was no uniformity or harmony. Bancroft found the famous Sunday evening "at homes" of Schleiermacher occupied with the most varied topics. The great man himself had a nature marked by a cool sort of rationalism. He did not frankly state his opinion. His manner in conversation as in preaching was that of a skillful fencer, adroit in the use of the foil, and was heightened by his small, lithe, and somewhat deformed figure. His acuteness was his most remarkable gift, and when preaching he treated dogma historically, and was neither fervid nor emotionally pious. Faultless in life and conduct, he was not carried away by the idea of benevolence. In short he was a mirror of the thought of his time, at home in any company and on any topic of politics or affairs. With the peculiar attitude of Hegel, and with Schleiermacher denying any originality to his philosophy, there was little in Berlin to turn a well-balanced head. There were great scholars in plenty, but, like Bopp, who spoke English well and fluently and revealed the identity of the grammar of the Indo-European languages, they were content with their specialties and took little interest in political or philosophical tendencies. After leaving Berlin, Bancroft studied history for a time under Von Schlosser at Heidelberg, but was scarcely conscious of his influence.

During the autumn months of 1821 he traveled on foot through Switzerland, and reached Italy in the late vintage time, stopping by the roadside to watch the peasantry treading out the wine-press in their primitive fashion, and washing their empurpled bodies in the running brooks. Then, after a rapid glimpse of Venice and Florence, came Rome. It is not unlikely that the Italian visit, short as it was, influenced in Bancroft the finer side of the mind, the æsthetic faculty and imaginative powers, more deeply than any other period. For three months he was intimate in the families of Niebuhr and Bunsen. In the

case of the latter family the intimacy has continued to children and children's children. It was his habit, as his records show, to extend, during that precious time, each day into two. Rising at dawn, he breakfasted by candlelight and hurried forth in the early morning to the day's task of seeing—churches, galleries, ruins, antiquities, he devoured everything with his eyes, stopping only for a frugal luncheon of a few cakes or a little fruit, and dining at nightfall as his means would allow. Then hurrying to his room he read till the small hours of the morning—all art, history, and the masterpieces of Italian letters, but in particular Dante. Meantime he was forming such a meager collection of art-objects as he could afford, so as to have on his return a material illustration of and a set of mnemonic aids to the work of the great masters, who charmed and elevated his thoughts. Early in the following spring he went on to Naples and Pæstum, returning by the coast to Leghorn. While there the romance of the Mediterranean shore seems to have affected him as it has so many fresh and receptive spirits. Rowing far out to sea, he leaped in and swam toward shore, but escaped the sad fate which befell Shelley only a few weeks later, at Spezzia.

The American squadron was lying at the time in the harbor of Leghorn, and Bancroft was invited by the commodore to meet Byron aboard the flagship. There were present only a few other Americans, among them the consul at Tunis, with his wife and several ladies. When the poet, accompanied by his host and the principal officers of the fleet, came up the companionway, his countenance immediately fell at the sight of the ladies among the new arrivals, thinking probably that they were Englishwomen who had taken advantage of the opportunity to spy him out. But on learning that they were Americans he at once recovered his cheerfulness, and was most approachable. In fact, when the consul's wife laughingly said that her children would want some proof that she had seen Lord Byron, she was permitted to take the rose from his buttonhole. Before leaving, the nobleman's secretary invited Bancroft in his master's name to visit Monte Nero. So intense was the enthusiasm for Byron among the officers of the fleet that when he was rowed ashore one captain manned his yard-arms and fired a salute, but the commodore, feeling that the guest of the day had no position which warranted so official a greeting, allowed it to go no further. Shortly afterward Bancroft wrote a note to ask if he might call at Monte Nero and received a pleasant, lively reply. Byron's reception of his guest was cordial. He was simply but carefully dressed, and during the

breakfast talked of Jeffrey and the bitter attacks of the "Edinburgh Review." His eye was bright and his manner animated, but without bitterness or rancor. He seemed intensely interested in Goethe, and asked many questions about him. The idea that "Manfred" was based on "Faust" he declared to be false, explaining that he had never even seen "Faust." He was evidently delighted to hear how great a favorite he was everywhere in Germany. He spoke also of Thorwaldsen's busts, and said, with seeming dissatisfaction, the last one was too spare. After breakfast he invited Bancroft into the drawing-room, from the windows of which he said Elba was visible, as indeed it was, but very dimly. While they were standing absorbed in trying to discern its outlines, the door opened softly, and a light footstep was heard. It was that of the Countess Guiccioli, and without the slightest embarrassment Byron turned and presented Bancroft to her. She at once made some introductory remark in Italian and talked for some time. The conversation became general, and in the course of it Byron remarked, incidentally, that the Countess did not like the scoffing tone of "Don Juan," and had entreated him not to go on with it, and that he had received letters from others to the same effect. That Bancroft's visit was remembered with pleasure is evident, both from the letters to Murray in which Byron alludes to his young visitor, and from the presentation copy of "Don Juan," with the author's autograph, still in Bancroft's library.

RETURN TO AMERICA.

FROM Leghorn Bancroft traveled to Genoa, and thence on horseback, with a pack-mule to carry the luggage, along the Riviera to Marseilles. The track was often so close to the edge of the sea that the water dashed over his horse's legs. After a short time in Lyons and the south of France he sailed for home. The fairest winds gave a prosperous voyage, Gibraltar was passed at the rate of nine knots against the current, the trade-winds blew in the loveliest weather, the peak of Teneriffe sank out of view, and the apprenticeship days were over. Surely there could have been no better preparation for the work of life than to have lived with the best men of the age, to have seen, known, and conversed with them on the most vital topics, and yet to have retained, as the sequel showed, independence of thought and the strong home feeling which enables one, when the halcyon days are past, to take up the burden of life with cheerfulness and energy, to seek permanent happiness in work and not in mere change of scene.

On his return to America Bancroft yielded once again to his father's wishes, and was licensed to preach. But his face was set toward pursuits which, though akin to the great profession, are yet aside from it. He felt the few sermons which he preached to be rather exercises in the careful writing of English than a heartfelt message of truth. In this crisis the devoted friendship of President Kirkland came to his assistance, and he accepted almost immediately the position of a teacher of Greek in Harvard College, performing its duties for a year. In 1823 he entered into an agreement with J. G. Cogswell, who was afterward librarian of the Astor Library, and founded the famous Round Hill school of Northampton, Massachusetts. It is not possible to trace accurately the underlying motives of this venture. It was thought by many an attempt to found a German gymnasium in America. But that could not have been the case, because Bancroft has always considered the gymnasium imperfect. There is too much mere teaching, and the system does not call forth that daily mental activity so essential to educated thinking. One thing it certainly was—the first organized endeavor to elevate the secondary schools of the country to the position which belongs to them in the formation of mind and character. A pleasant picture of the life and work at Round Hill is given in Miss Hale's *Life of Thomas Appleton*, who was a pupil there. It is probable that with the general plan of lifting up college work, there was also in view pecuniary reward. Thus far Bancroft had looked for his necessary expenses to an uncle and a brother. With generous haste he sought the shortest road to independence, and hoped the school might be profitable. But a trial lasting for ten years convinced him it could not be made so. Though Cogswell was an able man, the partners were not congenial, and there was friction in the business management. Then, too, the colleges required from students applying for entrance to the higher classes the fees of the lower years. This demand was intended to be, and was, a discouragement from any attempt on the part of that or any other school to carry boys further than the necessary work for admission to the freshman class. The time, however, was not wholly lost, for during the entire period his pen was busy with contributions to the "North American," to Walsh's "American Quarterly," and with a translation of Heeren's most important work. The latter was formally reviewed by the "Edinburgh Review," pronounced by Edward Everett to display "a mastery of two languages," and showed the marks of a fine historic style. It was immediately reprinted in Oxford without

any recognition of the translator, or even the mention of his name on the title-page. During his life in Northampton, moreover, Bancroft became an active member of the Democratic party, attending its conventions, writing its platforms, and guiding its councils in his native State. His first wife was a member of the famous Dwight family, who were Whigs, and at her request he never accepted office, although once elected, in 1830, to a seat in the Legislature without his knowledge, and once, in 1831, requested to accept the nomination for Secretary of State.

The death of Mrs. Bancroft followed closely upon his retirement from the Round Hill school. There were four children by his first marriage, two sons still living, and two daughters who died in infancy. The affectionate consideration for her wishes which had kept him from active political life during the years in Northampton continued after her death until 1837. During those years he devoted himself to literary work, publishing the first volume of his history in 1834 and the second in 1837. But in 1837 he was appointed collector of the port of Boston by Van Buren, and accepted the office. Thenceforward for many years his connection with active politics has been more or less constant, his career as a statesman culminating in the years of his residence as Minister at Berlin.

POLITICAL LIFE.

WHEN he entered upon his duties as collector, the law exacted from importers in payment of duties not cash, but bonds payable on time. A very large part of the whole revenue of the country was then levied in the port of Boston, and the amount of bonds received from the importing merchants during Bancroft's period of office reached to very many millions. All his predecessors, without exception, had left behind them uncollected bonds representing large sums, which have not been collected to this day. Of all those taken in the period of his service, not one that became due was left unsettled, or in arrears, when he retired from the office. Never in a single instance did the President or the Secretary of the Treasury seek to control his use of the appointing power. Among others to whom he had the opportunity of giving public employment was Hawthorne, who received an appointment to the most lucrative office in the gift of the collector. Hawthorne's biographer speaks of him as having remained in the office to the end of Van Buren's administration and having been removed with the rest. This is not true. Hawthorne, who, while in office, fulfilled his duty with the most punctilious exactness and

fidelity, resigned after two or three years, much against the wishes and entreaties of the collector. Another, who took a large part in the philosophical and religious controversies of the time, Orestes Brownson, received a valuable post, which gave him a residence as well as an income.

Many of the Democrats of Massachusetts looked on the policy of annexing Texas as fatal to their existence as a party. Bancroft's opinion to the contrary had been most unpopular, but in the State Convention at Worcester he explained with cogent and convincing arguments the merits and expediency of the measure. He pleaded for the extension of the "area of freedom" (Boston "Times," March 2, 1845), contending, as he had done from the first, that the annexation of Texas was a step conducive directly to a diminution of the political influence of slavery. Had Texas remained an independent State it could have imported slaves directly from Africa. By annexation Texas subjected itself to the laws of the United States against the foreign slave trade and stopped completely all increase of slavery from abroad, of which the continuance had so sadly affected South Carolina and Georgia. This view was shared by Robert J. Walker. Will any one consider what would have been the condition of the United States in their great civil war if Texas had been an independent power, exercising all the rights of a neutral nation? Moreover, the acquisition of Texas had rendered it impossible for Mexico to maintain a hold on Alta California, and the annexation of California by the administration of Polk was the death-blow to slavery. Texas had been recognized as an independent power by Great Britain and by France before the United States consented to its annexation.

On Polk's election Bancroft was chosen to represent the New England Democrats in the Cabinet. A man who takes much part in a conflict of opinions is pretty sure to fall among those who add passionate perverseness to passionate convictions. Several such persons in Massachusetts undertook to prevent his confirmation in the Senate as Secretary of the Navy, and for that purpose wrote to Mr. Archer, one of the Senators from Virginia, referring to several published articles in which Bancroft had expressed himself strongly on the subject of slavery, and communicated to him what they had done. What happened in the Senate is well known, because the vote for the injunction of secrecy was soon after removed. When the Senate came to consider the nomination, Senator Archer asked for a postponement of the vote, but not as an opponent. Bancroft's friends immediately con-

sented to pass it over for the day, giving the Senator from Virginia the opportunity which he wanted, to make inquiry. Senator Allen of Ohio came to Bancroft and inquired of him what he had written on the subject of slavery, and received a list of all the articles, with a note of where they could be found. Bancroft said that what he had written he had written from sincere convictions, that they were his opinions when he wrote them and were his opinions still; that if a question was to be raised in the Senate on his opinions on slavery, he must stand upon them as uttered by himself without concession, explanation, or compromise. Allen hunted up the papers and found, as he afterward said, that some points on the subject had been stated with great strength and in words which he perhaps would not have used; but that there was nothing Mr. Bancroft had written that he did not himself accept; and made a vehement speech on the subject in the Senate. But there was really no hesitation; Archer made no objection, and with very little debate Bancroft was confirmed unanimously. The Senator from Virginia, who had raised the inquiry, some days afterward called and led the conversation to the topic of "the institution." Bancroft listened with reserve, upon which the Senator himself broke out into the severest denunciation of slavery which could be uttered, condemning it with an intense sincerity of conviction that only personal observation could have forced upon him, and explained the infinite evil that slavery had done and was doing to Virginia. Whenever Bancroft has been before the Senate, he has never had a single vote against him; in every instance where he has been passed upon in the Senate, his nomination has been confirmed unanimously.

Polk said to one of his Cabinet after the inauguration that the four principal measures of his administration were to be: the settlement of the North-western boundary, the acquisition of California, the establishment of the constitutional treasury, and a tariff for revenue. Bancroft had his full share in these measures so far as they were accomplished while he was in America. As regarded the reduction of the tariff, Mr. Walker of the Treasury Department attended to it, and merits honor for his most successful discharge of the duty; but the Secretary of the Navy warmly approved the measure, and was able to promote the good work. The chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, who expressed more confidence in Bancroft than in others, came to consult with him on the points on which his own decision would turn, and asked whether the tariff as so greatly reduced would in his judgment produce a sufficient revenue for the expenses of the Government. In reply the opin-

ion was given that it would certainly suffice and probably produce a surplus. He went away satisfied, and supported the bill with his authority as chief on the Finance Committee; and it was triumphantly carried, and proved financially a perfect success.

The establishment of the Naval School was in this wise: Bancroft, having passed much of his life in schools and universities, entered his office of Secretary of the Navy with a wish to establish for the navy a school like that in operation for the army at West Point. It was plain to him that Congress could not be induced in advance to pass a law for the establishment of a naval school, for much opposition would arise from the fear of authorizing a costly establishment; and even if Congress had been favorable to the movement, a controversy would have sprung up as to the place for establishing it, involving sectional as well as local controversies. There was no chance of success but to present to Congress for its approbation a school already established and in full operation; and this he undertook to do in strict conformity to law and without passing beyond the limits of the appropriations already made and at his disposition. In this design he was aided by the President and by his colleagues.

The first question was, Where should it be established? If it had been at the North, the location would have called forth an almost unanimous opposition from the South, as the Military Academy was on the Hudson. Luckily at that time the army was ready to abandon its post at Annapolis. Bancroft requested Secretary Marcy, then in the Department of War, to transfer the post and its public buildings to the Secretary of the Navy. Marcy assented, and the President approved. Bancroft had then to see how he could get together the school, with its superintendent, pupils, and professors, without violating or seeming to violate a law. The law recognized the presence of teachers on board ships at sea; and it was common when ships were sent to sea to order an instructor to the ships. Sometimes an outsider got one of his friends, who wanted a sea voyage for health, put on board a ship, nominally as a teacher or as a chaplain, but no provision was made for the instruction of the young officers on shore; the consequence of which was that on their discharge from a sea voyage, they went where they pleased, at their own free will, and were scattered about in the various cities of the Union, exposed to all the dangers to which young men under twenty, without supervision and without employment, were exposed. So then to a certain extent the instruction of the midshipmen had been provided for by law; where the in-

struction was to be taken was not fixed by law. The Secretary of the Navy could therefore order the young officers to go to Annapolis and be taught, and those employed as professors, to go there and teach, and any high officer of the navy to go there as superintendent. A good many unsuitable teachers were retired from the service, and very able men carefully selected to take their places. Then the young midshipmen, as they returned from a voyage, and the newly appointed midshipmen, were ordered there, and an examination was made requisite for admission, and for advancement.

When Congress met there was a naval school in full operation at Annapolis, where the midshipmen were on duty, and therefore under the discipline of naval law. All the expenses of the school had been paid for out of the various appropriations without the violation of a law. The question came necessarily before Congress, for the building handed over by the War Department to the Navy Department needed considerable repair in order to serve the new purposes thoroughly well. The confidence of the chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, James J. McKay, was of the greatest importance.* Bancroft followed the progress of the bill for establishing this school with the utmost closeness. No one questioned that he had carefully kept within the law; the House committees and the House approved; resistance in the Senate was threatened; but the Secretary of the Navy was in the Senate the day when the decisive vote was taken, and was gladdened as he saw men of all political parties and from all sections of the country uniting to form a majority for the School. The measure was carried by a very good vote, and once carried, the Naval School was safe.

Among the other great questions which had troubled the country from the establishment of its independence was the settlement of the North-western boundary. After the peace the English refused to surrender the Northern ports, and by the Jay treaty consented only to a joint occupation of the unsettled Western country. This had continued from the days of Washington, to the great advantage of the British and the Hudson Bay Company. The first act of Polk was to renounce the joint occupation of the country over which the agreement had extended. The next immediate consequence was the settlement of the North-western boundary, which

had so long troubled the country and which had been left by preceding administrations as unfinished business. The English at first attempted to inspire terror; but Polk was a man who, without making any pretensions to courage, possessed it in the highest degree both as a man and as a statesman, joined with prudence and circumspection; and Buchanan, the Secretary of State, was able soon to bring the negotiations to a close on the boundary question, and the treaty was signed and ratified in England before the retirement of the Cabinet of which Sir Robert Peel had been at the head.

Polk saw very clearly that the real power of Mexico did not extend over California, and that it could only be safely and securely settled by the United States. To leave the matter loose was to open California to the inroads of private adventurers, or to expose it to the claims of some European power. He was fixed in his purpose to seek its administration by treaty with Mexico; but it soon became certain that Mexico would engage in war to avenge herself against America for admitting Texas as one of her States, although Texas before it was so admitted had been recognized as an independent State by the two leading powers of commercial Europe, by Great Britain and by France. Bancroft watched the course of events, and took the measures which were necessary to secure American ascendancy in California. As Secretary of the Navy he sent out orders so early as the 24th of June, being fully convinced that Mexico intended to go to war, and that not a moment should be lost in securing California. The nature of the orders that were given will be seen best by the following extracts from his letters to the American naval commander in the Pacific, as under those orders possession was taken of California:

"If you ascertain with certainty that Mexico has declared war against the United States, you will at once possess yourself of the port of San Francisco, and blockade or occupy such other ports as your force may permit.

"Yet even if you should find yourself called upon by the certainty of an express declaration of war against the United States to occupy San Francisco and other Mexican ports, you will be careful to preserve, if possible, the most friendly relations with the inhabitants; and, where you can do so, you will encourage them to adopt a course of neutrality." Bancroft to Sloat, June 24, 1845.

"You will consider the most important object to be, to take and to hold possession of San Francisco; and this you will do without fail." Same to same, May 15, 1846.

* "Not only has he" [G. B.] "obtained great celebrity as an essayist and historian, but the policy which he advocated while at the head of the Navy Department gave him the character of an accomplished statesman. While his views were sufficiently enlarged

and liberal, they received the approbation of one of the most ultra economists and reformers in the House of Representatives." [James J. McKay of North Carolina.] "History of the Polk Administration," by Lucien B. Chase, p. 25.

"The Department has received your letter No. 51, of June 6, from which it appears that while you were aware of the existence of 'actual war' between the United States and Mexico, you remained in a state of inactivity and did not carry out the instructions of June 24, 1845, framed to be executed even in the event of the mere declaration of war, much more in the event of actual hostilities. Those instructions you were ordered to carry out 'at once.'

"In my letter of August 5, 1845, the receipt of which you acknowledged on the 28th of January, 1846, referring to them, I said, '*In the event of war*, you will obey the instructions recently addressed to you via Panama.'

"In my letter of October 17, 1845, of which you acknowledge the receipt on the 17th March, 1846, referring to these instructions once more, I said further, '*In the event of actual hostilities between the Mexican government and our own*, you will so dispose of your whole force as to carry out most effectually the objects specified in the instructions forwarded to you from the Department in view of such a contingency.' And surely there is no ambiguity in this language.

"And in my letter of 23d February last, sent through Mexico, I remarked, '*This letter is sent to you overland, inclosed, as you suggest, to Messrs. Mott, Talbot & Co., Mazatlan, and you will readily understand the reserve with which it is written.*'

"The Department on August 5, 1845, had also told you that 'your force should not be weakened while hostilities are threatened by Mexico.' Your course was particularly approved in detaining the frigate *Constitution*. The Department will hope that a more urgent necessity than as yet appears existed for the otherwise premature return of that vessel.

"The Department does not charge you with disobedience of orders. It willingly believes in the purity of your intentions. But your anxiety not to do wrong has led you into a most unfortunate and unwarranted inactivity." Same to same, Aug. 13, 1846.

In Curtis's "Life of Buchanan" will be found two letters which are of interest in the same connection, as showing Bancroft's share in the important events connected with the acquisition of California. The first is from Washington, written while he was still Secretary of the Navy; the second was written from London after his appointment as Minister at the Court of St. James.

When the collision about slavery led to civil war, no one was more quick than Bancroft to see the nature of the controversy, and that the only solution would be the abolition of slavery as the result of the war. Twice he delivered orations on that theme in the city of New York, once upon an express vote by the city government, when he examined and controverted the interpretation of the Constitution on which the plea for slavery rested. That speech was perhaps more carefully prepared than anything he had yet printed. After the peace he pursued the same line of argument with all whom he could reach; and the nature of his views will best appear from a letter he wrote to Mr. S. S. Cox, then a member of the House of Representatives from the city of New York, and lately Minister at Constantinople:

"NEW YORK, January 28, 1865.

"MY DEAR MR. COX: You and I stood together with Douglas against the outrageous attempt to force slavery upon Texas. I read your speech the other day, and think your argument perfectly sound, that the removal of slavery may be effected by an amendment of the Constitution. Our friend's question, whether a power exist to establish slavery everywhere, is, *first*, as foolish as to ask if the amendment could be made denying in a bill of rights every one of the commandments, and, *secondly*, the power to establish slavery everywhere was not contemplated by men who formed a union 'to establish justice and secure the blessings of liberty.'

"I write to-day in full recollection of the noble battle which we fought together against the attack on the liberties of Texas. Let me now most earnestly entreat you and advise with you, to record your vote in favor of the amendment of the Constitution for removing the cause of this rebellion.

"It is the part of justice. It is the part of peace; nothing else will quiet the South. When the matter is fixed, they will see what they must renounce, and will acquiesce. The measure is the only one which can restore prosperity to the South; punish slavery and then we can cherish the former slave-holder. The use of slave labor, as you know, locked the gates of the South against the free laborer; remove slavery, and the tide of free labor will rush towards the South with surprising swiftness. In ten years Virginia will be more peopled and richer than she ever was before. Texas will be our Italy.

"We Democrats are right in the coming financial questions, and the country knows it. You cannot present the issue of the finances till the slavery question is settled, and that question can be settled but in one way. Do away with slavery, and the Democrats will be borne into power on the wings of their sound principles of finance.

"You may jar on a few; you will come into public life again if you do but sustain this amendment. The progress of opinion on the subject is truly wonderful; the removal of slavery is now looked upon here as the wisest counsel of conservatism.

"Do not, my friend, let your name be registered as one who defeats this measure. It will stand out to all time; and your children, and your friends, and your political supporters, and you yourself would regret it, almost as soon as your vote should be recorded.

"You know I have no fanaticism. I view this matter calmly, bringing out and applying the rules which history furnishes and which are as fixed and immutable as the laws of the material universe. The path of wisdom, of patriotism, of peace, of future success, leads now through the abolition of slavery by an amendment of the Constitution.

"Listen to what I say, and if you take the advice of one who may plead his age in excuse of his importunity, you will soon own me to be the best friend and counselor you ever had in your life.

"Faithfully yours,

"GEO. BANCROFT."

Throughout the civil war Bancroft was an ardent patriot, and delivered before Congress in February, 1866, a eulogy on the life and career of Lincoln as sympathetic and stately as that which he had pronounced from the porch of the Capitol many years before on the character and services of Jackson. The reconstruction measures of Andrew Johnson met with his hearty support, and in 1867 he was sent as Minister to Berlin to establish the right of the immigrant German Americans to renounce

their old allegiance and accept an exclusive American citizenship. It was against the usage of Germany and against the policy of the War Department of Prussia and all the other North German States. If the German American revisited his old home, he was liable to be seized and forced to do all the military service which, by the laws of Germany, could have been required of him, had he not emigrated. Bancroft was to obtain relief in the case. The argument that weighed much with Bismarck for granting the wish of the United States was, that the Germans in America might not be interrupted in their domestic intercourse with their parents, with their brethren, with the members of their families who remained at home; but the question assumed a special importance, as it was the first time that by a formal act the principle of the renunciation of citizenship at the will of the individual was recognized. But the desire to be on amiable terms with the United States and to promote the continuance of affectionate intercourse between those Germans who had elected the United States for their home and the friends whom they had left behind them prevailed with Bismarck.

The British Minister kept watch over the negotiation, with the determination to abide by the result of the treaty. The first result of Bancroft's success was to relieve German-Americans from military service in Germany. The next good result was immediate; namely, the renunciation by England of her claim to indefeasible allegiance, and to the right to impress into the British service a former British subject who had become an American citizen. The North-western boundary having been settled by treaty, Bancroft, while United States Minister in Great Britain, had perceived an incipient effort of a great English interest to encroach on the territory which had been acknowledged by the treaty to be a part of the United States. Just before the British administration had entered on the design to disturb the recent treaty, he took occasion in a dispatch to that government to make, incidentally, an official statement of the true interpretation of the section, without even a hint that there could be any controversy about it. In that way the passage in the dispatch did not provoke an answer; but there was left in the English archives an official description of what the boundary was under the hand of one who was in the American Cabinet at the time the treaty was made. By and by the importunities of interested persons in England, who

possessed a great party influence, began to make themselves heard, and the British Government by degrees supported the attempt to raise a question respecting the true line of the boundary of the North-west, and finally formulated a perverse claim of their own, with a view to obtain what they wanted as a compromise.

The American administration had of course changed, and the President and his Cabinet, having had no part in the negotiation, agreed to refer the question to an arbiter. They made the mistake of consenting that the arbiter, if there was uncertainty as to the true boundary line, might himself establish a boundary of compromise. The person to whom the settlement of the dispute was to be referred was the President of the Republic of Switzerland. The American Secretary of State chanced to die while the method of arrangement was still inchoate. Bancroft at once wrote to the new Secretary, urging him not to accept the proposal of a compromise, because that would seem to admit an uncertainty as to the American title, and to sanction and even invite a decision of the arbiter in favor of a compromise, and would open the way for England, under an appearance of concession, to obtain all that she needed. Being at the time United States Minister at the court of Prussia, he advised the Government to insist on the American claim in full, not to listen to the proposal for a compromise, but to let each party formulate its claim, and call on the arbiter to decide which was right, and urged it to select for that arbiter the Emperor of Germany. Now the new Department of State had never accepted the plan of settling the dispute by a compromise. They were willing for a reference, if each State would insist, each for itself, on its own interpretation of the treaty. The Department of State at once consented that the referee should be the Emperor of Germany, and left the whole matter of carrying out the American argument to Bancroft. The conduct of the question, the first presentation of the case, as well as the reply to the British, were every word by him, and the decision of the Emperor of Germany was unreservedly in favor of the United States.*

HISTORICAL WORK.

BUT Bancroft's work as an historian is even more important and interesting than his eminent public services. Indeed, to many his career as a statesman and diplomatist will seem almost providential in the opportunities

* This imperfect sketch of Bancroft's public life is necessarily short, but it is believed to be accurate. It is based, as indeed the entire article thus far has been, in part and chiefly on records of conversations between

him and the writer, held at intervals since 1873, and in part on memoranda kindly furnished by Bancroft himself. In the most important matters, the latter have often been used verbatim in this article.

it has given him for examining and collecting the materials upon which his most philosophic, thorough, and painstaking history of American origins has been based. He was, indeed, first led to devote himself to the writing of American history because there was no other field where he could so advantageously apply the principles so important in the use of original authorities. The germination of our national life was scarcely complete when he arrived at manhood, and he lived in the very midst of its growth and development. It is essentially characteristic of Bancroft that he was led to the writing of history by motives of a kind which are not those of the great school of merely artistic historians. Once determined to be a man of letters, after struggles of mind which led to the most thorough self-examination, he set his face toward a single aim. Though much entreated, he wrote next to nothing for the journals and periodical press after his resolution was taken. No doubt his father's "Life of Washington" had some influence in the choice of history from among the various departments of literature, and it will interest believers in heredity to know that a son of his first American ancestor mentioned in his will and made a special provision for "his history-books." But the commanding motive was a regard for history as a discipline of philosophy. The only test of philosophic truth is to examine the collective will of mankind, purged from the conflicting doubts, passions, and emotions of individuals. There is the same conservation of force in the moral as in the physical world; you must, therefore, seek a power universal from all eternity. One great test of Christianity is, that it has the principle which, in spite of any intermixture of human civilization, is the source of all good. This eternal reason, shorn of the imperfections inherent in man, is the infinite, perfect, enduring logos. The Christian incarnation makes practical the doctrine of the Trinity. The spark of the divine in us enables us to arrive at the knowledge of the infinitely perfect, and by what is divine in man we are younger brethren of the Elder Brother, who is all divine. Bancroft's devotion to Kant as well as Edwards is explained by the fact that, meeting the skeptics on their own ground, Kant, still proves the existence of *a priori* truth and of *a priori* synthetic judgments. His standpoint, therefore, as an historian, is that of the newer scientific school, which views history as a unit, its forces as constant, and their manifestations as parts of an organized whole. Every individual must have his place in the picture, but the background is the history of the race.

The next important factor in Bancroft's choice of a profession was beyond a doubt

the influence of Heeren. In fact, if it were not acknowledged frankly as it is, there would be no difficulty in the attempt to trace it. Heeren's great rules were two: first, distinguish between original authorities (*Quellen*) and historical aids (*Hilfsmittel*); second, represent every man from his own stand-point, and then criticise him as much as you choose from yours. Original authorities are those who were on the spot and did or saw what constitutes the facts given or else heard from another who was on the spot. Historical aids may be illustrated, for the sake of example, by the decisions of the Supreme Court in the interpretation of the Constitution. As Bancroft himself has said, the tests of a historian are those of time and place—the when, the where—and of the actor—the by whom. Heeren's method also was a development and ordering of events with a view to the mastery of the whole. He used geography not so much with reference to political divisions as to physical contours and their incidental effects in producing governmental divisions. He was always calm, deliberate, moderate, except on rare occasions, when he could be very emphatic. Once, in speaking of the Spartans at Thermopylæ, he said that some strategists thought they should have retreated, and then grimly and vigorously remarked, "No doubt there would have been a retreat had the critics been in their places."

Bancroft's purpose to devote himself to the history of America was definitely formed before he left Round Hill. The first volume was begun in Northampton, and for the sake of access to books he removed to Springfield and spent the following winter in Boston, where he worked in the State Library, in the Athenæum, and at Cambridge. The same plan and thoroughness characterize his earliest work as much almost as that of his ripest years. He seems to have gone at everything exhaustively; certainly, his readers will testify that he spared no pains. He read with care in order to form his style, as extensively, in all likelihood, as even Prescott. The works of Burke were always near at hand. Milton has, however, always been his solace and delight. He is said to know by heart "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Comus," and "Lycidas," and long passages from the "Paradise Lost." He also read Bacon constantly. In conversation I have heard him wonder how Milton could have leaned to Arianism when he had a mind too great to write prose, or how Bacon could have ever shown such weakness for the world as to be at times the miserable temporizer that he was: he was one of the wisest men that ever lived. Harriet Martineau had a solid foundation for the remarkable characterization of

Bancroft's work even in its inception. She says : * "The Americans have also a historian of promise. Mr. Bancroft's 'History of the United States' is little more than begun, but the beginning is characterized by an impartial and benevolent spirit, and by the indications which it affords of the author's fidelity to democratic principles : the two primary requisites in a historian of the republic. The carrying on the work to a completion will be a task of great toil and anxiety, but it will be a most important benefit to society at large, if it fulfills its promise."

The work was successful from the beginning because it was done in a spirit so sincere and philosophical. It met with a reception which was most gratifying at home, and in Europe its popularity was remarkable. The first three volumes were translated into Danish, Italian, and German by translators who obtained the author's permission. It was done into French without his knowledge, and sent into the South American colonies to further the awakening spirit of Liberty. There was a Scotch edition in two volumes and an English one on which the author received copyright royalty until the courts decided that as an American he was not entitled to it. It was natural, therefore, that when Bancroft went to England as Minister he was warmly received by both men of letters and the historic families. It was while visiting at the great houses that much of his material was collected. Lord Lansdowne in particular gave him free access in his own house to the whole of Lord Shelburne's papers. He was intimate with Peel and Palmerston and knew both Disraeli and Gladstone, who was at that time the great gladiator of the House. Bancroft had in the mean time married again. His second wife, who lived to a ripe old age and died only a few months since, was the daughter of a distinguished and wealthy merchant of Boston and a woman of remarkable education and charming manners. In every way a suitable and helpful companion to her distinguished husband, their life in England was a social triumph throughout. When they left, Macaulay gave a breakfast to Mrs. Bancroft at the Albany, the only instance of such an attention on his part to any lady.

It was the habit of Milman, Hallam, Macaulay, and Lord Mahon to breakfast together once a week. Bancroft was nearly always with them. The intercourse of those meetings was intimate and delightful, in spite of the widely different characters of the friends and their still more varying ability. Lord Mahon's History has already fallen into the oblivion which it merits. Hallam's work, though often

rousing opposition as to its conclusions, is as sincere and thorough as his character was lovely. Dean Milman has taken his place among the masters of history. Macaulay's researches were made in the fairest spirit, and his memory was of course phenomenal, but his strong prejudices being a part of himself, his History is but a great epic of the rise, growth, and triumph of the Whigs. Its dazzling qualities will certainly insure its immortality as a splendid literary creation and prolong the renown of its author. He was a magnificent painter, but no believer in a philosophy of history or in philosophical history. In Bancroft's work there lie the qualities of permanency, and so long has it been before the world and stood the test of critical examination that we might almost say the judgment of posterity had already been pronounced.

During his term of office in London, Bancroft was accustomed to spend two months of every winter in Paris, where he made many friends. It was then he first met Thiers, of whom he once asked how many republicans there were in Paris. "Just as many as there are of your compatriots," was the reply. When they met again in 1867, the first words Thiers uttered were, "Ah, Mr. Bancroft, you will find many more republicans in France now than when you last were here." It was during these first visits to Paris that Bancroft's collections from archives first began to take form. From 1830 he had collected original domestic papers and letters from all possible sources. But the famous collection of state papers from the French archives, since published by his early friend the Comte de Circourt, whose countess had what is considered the last of the famous French *salons*, was begun and completed through the influence of friends made at that time. When offer of payment for the work was made, the answer was, "Oh, no, we have a lot of young men here whom we have in training; it will be good practice for them." On the other hand, the English Foreign Office and our own State Department have a fixed charge for all such work. Of original and copied documents there are in Bancroft's library five hundred and more bound volumes. Besides the copies from the American, English, and French archives, there are others from those of Austria, Holland, Spain, and Russia. This is, of course, exclusive of the twelve thousand printed volumes which form his proper working library.

While therefore Bancroft's mission to England was marked by no diplomatic work of commanding importance, it was nevertheless most influential in his literary career by reason both of the opportunities he had for contact with great minds and for forming his collec-

* "Society in America," II. p. 212.

tion from public and private archives in England and France. The most of his fourth and fifth volumes was written in London, and in 1849 he was made Doctor of Common Laws by the University of Oxford. On his return to America he settled in New York, where he continued to live for many years. Surrounded by the materials he had gathered with such care and from the very fountain-head, he put forth volume after volume of his exhaustive work. In 1860 appeared the eighth volume, which brought the history to the outbreak of the Revolution, and the ninth in 1866. The literary circle of New York was most kind in its welcome of the historian, but the most cherished of all his friends during that period with whom he constantly associated in close and intimate intercourse was the late Professor Henry B. Smith. A man of untiring industry and great ability, his mind was stored with treasures from the thought of the world, and in particular he was versed as few Americans have been in the intricacies of German thought. In his clear comprehension of the force of ideas and the devout spirit with which he approached the study of all human interests, Bancroft found a congenial sphere of thought, and their relations were a mutual solace and refreshment amid the arduous labors of both. Their religious views, moreover, were very similar, slight and unimportant differences only serving to heighten the interest with which they discussed and often molded the thought of our day on the most vital questions in their peculiar spheres.

It would be impossible to give any adequate idea of the literary life of Berlin during the period which includes the years from 1868 to 1874 without constant reference to the part which the United States Minister had in that life. The connection between the literary and political circles of Berlin is very close. The Government has a just pride in its most famous university, and finds a return for its lavish expenditure in the services which the distinguished professors ungrudgingly render in every direction, but especially in those of public and private law and as legislators in the Prussian and Imperial Parliaments and in the city councils of Berlin. In fact, this connection is traditional. Macaulay sneers at the father of Frederic the Great and regards his "beer-congresses" as orgies. Bancroft says they were no such thing. The king was a Calvinist; he wished to keep down taxation, and lived, therefore, with the frugality of a private man. But he invited to meet him and chose as his friends the greatest men of the day in letters and science. They met around a long table, each with his pipe and his can of beer, and there the king listened to the most splen-

did theories which the thought of the day could offer. It was to this Calvinism that Prussia's great advance was due. Where Calvinism is, there is liberty. Calvinism depends on no dynasty; Lutheranism depends on princes. The system of civil service instituted by Frederic William I. was the finest in Europe, and endures in great part to this day. While, therefore, the court and diplomatic circles are among the most ceremonious of Europe, there is an inner circle where letters and statesmanship combine as probably nowhere else in the world. And of that circle Bancroft for many reasons became a member. He was found at the private entertainments of the palace when no other foreign diplomat was invited. He often took his horseback rides with Bismarck and visited him in the retirement of his own home at Varzin, where no member of the diplomatic corps except Bancroft was ever received. Having pointed out Moltke's greatness as a captain in a former introduction to his ninth volume, the great general gave in return his hearty and sincere friendship. And of the closer literary and scientific circle Bancroft's house and table were a constant meeting-place. Helmholtz, Mommsen, Droysen, Dörner, and all the rest were constantly there. It was in great measure due to this intimacy with the foremost men in the formative period of German unity that he lost the friendship of many who had before received him with regard in France. During the Franco-Prussian war he celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation at Göttingen. Among other congratulations was a telegram from Bismarck in the field. To this he replied in the following letter:

"BERLIN, September 30th, 1870.

"MY DEAR COUNT: I was equally surprised and delighted that while you are tasked with the work of renovating Europe, you yet found time to send me lately a friendly congratulation on my being spared so long. It is indeed a great happiness to survive till these times, when three or four men, who loved nothing so much as peace, and after long and hard service were only seeking to close their career in tranquillity, win during a war of defense more military glory than the wildest imagination conceived of, and in three months bid fair to bring the German hope of a thousand years to its fulfillment.

"So I gratefully accept the good-will conceded to my old age; for old age, which is always nearest to Eternity, is this year mightiest on earth, this German war being conducted to its ends by the aged. You, to be sure, are young; but Roon must be classed among the venerables; Moltke is within twenty-three days as old as I am; and your king in years and youthfulness excels us all. May I not be proud of my contemporaries? Retain for me your regard in the little time that remains to me. I am ever, my dear Count, most sincerely yours,

"GEORGE BANCROFT."

Bismarck gave the letter to the German press. It was translated back into English

and printed in the London "Times," read by the French, and contained to their irritated minds a meaning which was never in the writer's thoughts.

No man ever celebrated a greater triumph than Bancroft in the last days of his life in Berlin. Souvenirs and mementos poured in from the emperor, empress, and the court, while his friends vied in doing him honor. The Royal Academy gathered for an unwonted purpose—to give him a farewell dinner, where words of affection and appreciation were spoken by the aristocracy of German letters to the great representative of America. Finally the universities of Munich, Berlin, and Heidelberg united in a farewell greeting, the words of which contain sentiments which might satisfy the most soaring ambition.

"Your name is the intellectual possession of every one among us. You have contributed to the more complete understanding of the problems set for a free people in that, as one of the foremost historians, you have portrayed those immortal deeds which led to the rise of a great free State beyond the sea, and which will find in every age a response in the hearts of free-minded men. We feel a just pride that you may be numbered among those who most thoroughly appreciate German science. . . . We can recall with satisfaction your name to prove that as the representative of the United States you combined the spirit of true scientific procedure with the insight of a statesman."

There follow a few more paragraphs in the same style, and the document is signed by over ninety professors.

The years since 1874 have been spent in Washington and Newport. They have been probably the most laborious of his life. The same habits of work, which in the midst of and throughout his public life enabled him still to find time for writing, continue even now. Rising about five, he seats himself at his desk and prepares the work of the day. About seven a light breakfast is set at his side and eaten without interrupting the course of work. At eight his secretary arrives, to find an ample day's task arranged before him. Dictation, revision, verification of authorities continue till two in the afternoon, luncheon, if any, having been brought in like the breakfast. Then follow the two hours of outdoor exercise, walking, driving, or more likely riding, with which no hindrance of weather or anything except sickness is permitted to interfere. The rest of the day, till ten, is given to social intercourse. Bancroft's method of composition is the most laborious and painstaking conceivable. He hoped, of course, to have come much further, and believes our history can be written down to 1865. But he has

sacrificed all to thoroughness. From every available source the facts are selected, verified, and copied into day-books, of which there is one for every year with several capacious pages for every day. Then the historical aids are gathered on every hand. Having made himself thoroughly familiar with both, he dictates a text, which is immediately revised and corrected by his own hand, copied by a clerk, and laid away. Oftentimes seven revisions and corrections of important passages have been made before the copy reached the printer. Here is an example of his tirelessness recently given in a leading newspaper:

"The whole subject of Indian customs, manners, etc., has been developed through the labors of antiquarians, within, say, the past twenty years. Little was known at the time Mr. Bancroft wrote the earlier volumes of his history, and the account given there of the aborigines was necessarily written with limited knowledge. When he began the present revision—in which he is pruning off remorselessly many of the flowers of rhetoric with which he adorned and perhaps over-adorned the pages in his younger days—he secured the coöperation of the most learned Indian ethnologist in the country. The book was critically examined on this topic, and every deficiency sternly brought to view. Then Mr. Bancroft set to work to master the subject for himself, and when he had read every book and periodical article he could find in the Congressional Library, and every book he could buy, he felt that he could venture to write upon it."

During this last period the "History of the Constitution," in two volumes, has been written, and an exhaustive revision of his entire work in the light of our latest knowledge has been given to the public; and at present he is as busy with his gigantic task as ever, recording the work of the early administrations and his estimate of the relative powers of the great statesmen who guided us in the dark, groping period of our national life. Ranke used to say that he worked on his Universal History from pure laziness, because he had nothing else to do; and though it was a fine paradox, it was true. But Bancroft has plenty to do outside of his routine. He has time to preside over the American Historical Society and retain a lively interest in his friends. His constant watch on all new movements in politics and science is proved by the pamphlet on the legal-tender decisions of the Supreme Court, which appeared but a short while since, and by the articles he sends from time to time to the magazines. He is still alert and ready; his library is constantly enriched by the newest books; and while performing literary feats that scarcely find a parallel, he can still retain seat in the saddle, which augurs well for the preservation of life and the prolongation of work.

William M. Sloane.



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